

ORIGINAL

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AZ CORP COMMISSION  
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My name is Marilyn Courier. My husband, Ernest, and I live in the Boulders community in Carefree. I thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding Black Mountain Sewer Company's request for a rate increase.

We would not be here today, objecting to a rate increase, but for the terrible sewer odor we have lived with for nearly four years.

The odor problem that exists in various areas in the Town of Carefree is, and has been, far more pronounced, and of much larger scope than the Town Officials, past homeowners' boards, and to some extent, the regulatory agencies have acknowledged. And it's been around for a long time.

In the past, in our neighborhood, the odor occurred once or twice a day, and was slight and of short duration.

Then, in late summer of 2002, a tsunami of horrible sewer odor engulfed our neighborhood, drastically altering life as we knew it.

- A. Folks who had been given the key to a home on Boulder Dr. by the owners, had to call their friends to say, "Thank you so much for your hospitality, but we just can't stay here any longer.", and explained why.
- B. It was impossible to work in the yard, or enjoy our patios because the stench was intolerable.
- C. Bikers and joggers disappeared from our street.

Since early 2003, I have talked to many people about the problem, and have learned that broad areas in Carefree, including downtown, have been affected at one time or another.

The problem even reached into the community of Sentinal Rock, located on the west side of Black Mountain.

An area particularly hard hit is Carefree Inn Estates. For the past 3 ½ years, residents have suffered terrible sewer odor due to the proximity of the CIE lift station and its' septic wet wells.

The problem has subsided downtown and in Sentinal Rock. But it continues to plague the homes near the lift station in Carefree Inn Estates, and areas near lift stations in the Boulders community.

For the past several years, our community has suffered visits by (what we call the sewer sucker trucks) bringing sewage from one troubled site down our streets to be dumped into the manhole in front of the plant. This has occurred at any hour of the day or night. Now I should explain that BMSC sealed the manhole covers to keep the stench within the system. But when the truck drivers deliver a load, they break the seal when opening the cover to dump. These drivers do not reseal the covers when replacing them, because, as they state, "It's not their job." Once, we waited four days for the company to come out and reseal a cover on our street. In the meantime, sewer odor floated around the neighborhood.

The presence of the sewer sucker trucks means that a component in the sewer system is unable to cope with the load and the resultant backup of sewage.

On Dec. 2, 2005, there was a Town Hall meeting to discuss the odor situation. At that meeting, Mike Weber, the General Manager at that time, was asked if it would be possible for him to convince his superiors to release more money for the needed repairs. He stated that, and I quote, "I can get as much money as I want from Canada." Yet he clung to an operating budget that did not include funding for meaningful improvements. He was then both baffled and resentful of customer complaints when no progress was made.

The Black Mountain Sewer Co. has too many "captive users" who have waited far too long for it to get its' act together, and who feel that the present rate of \$38.00 per month is more than enough given the current state of affairs. What they have done so far, is to implement temporary fixes, which have already failed.

In a related matter, I wish to state that in the particular case of BMSC, inspections by the regulatory agencies are essentially meaningless because they are of the call ahead variety for the sake of convenience of the inspectors. 48-72, or more, hours notice given, provides sufficient time for the company to clean house and pour chemicals into lift stations and other trouble areas to mask the odor.

I called an official at ADEQ to discuss this issue with him. He denied that the sewer company was given advance notice of inspections. I asked him, "You mean you don't mind driving out to Carefree to inspect, only to find the plant gate locked? There was a pause. He replied, "Mrs. Courier, I don't have the resources to drive all over and not find people there."

The de facto result of these call ahead inspections is that the status quo is preserved through the offending utility being found in compliance no matter how wretched their performance is.

The owners of this dysfunctional system, Black Mountain Sewer Company, have requested a 13.52% rate increase. This request has not been earned and is without merit.

In closing, the Arizona Republic is replete with stories about small communities, who are being serviced by private, for profit, sewer companies, and whose citizens live with sewer odors. These communities are rapidly growing, and they need REAL help from the state.

Thank you,

Marilyn Courier